

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR DEVELOPING TAILORED CONTENT

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0002] This application relates to Attorney Docket No. 36968-265386 (BS01341), filed simultaneously, entitled "System and Method for Utilizing Television Viewing Patterns," which is incorporated herein by reference. This application also relates to U.S. Application Serial No. 09/496825, filed February 1, 2000, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention generally relates to the measurement of content-access patterns. The present invention more particularly relates creating content related to subscriber content-access patterns and associated behaviors.

BACKGROUND

[0004] Individuals receive information and entertainment content from a wide variety of media sources. These sources include radio, newspapers, the Internet, and television content providers.

[0005] To support the creation and distribution of content, providers must derive revenue from the content. For example, television content providers derive substantial revenues from advertising. During the broadcast of a television program, advertisements, in the form of commercials, are inserted at various time intervals. An advertiser pays the broadcaster to insert the advertisement. Other sources of revenue include pay-per-view, subscription, and licensing fees paid by subscribers for specific content or content-related packages. Internet content providers derive revenue in similar ways.

[0006] The amount of money that an advertiser pays is related to the number of subscribers watching or accessing a broadcast. Conventionally, for television advertising, advertising revenue equals a rate per thousand viewers multiplied by the number of viewers estimated to be viewing a program. Web site content providers charge advertisers a fixed amount per advertising impression. Also, Pay-per-view, subscriptions, and licensing fees all increase as the number of viewers of content increase. Therefore, the higher the number of viewers or subscribers accessing content, the greater the revenue.

[0007] In the case of television programming, if a program is popular, the provider charges a higher advertising rate. In contrast, if a television program cannot produce at least as much revenue as it costs to produce the program, the provider will generally cancel the program. Therefore, television-programming providers are very interested in determining the popularity of specific programs

[0008] Additional factors beyond the popularity of a program may affect the number of viewers who watch it. For example, a program scheduled adjacent to a popular program or between two popular programs may attain higher ratings than it might achieve without such opportune scheduling. A similar effect occurs on web sites. A large number of web site users

may read content posted on a popular web site. However the same piece appearing on a less popular site may attract little attention. Therefore, content providers are interested in determining the interrelationships between various combinations of content and content types.

[0009] Conventional television programs and programming packages are designed to appeal, to the extent possible, to a large group of individual subscribers. Appealing to a large number of subscribers requires compromises that may lessen the appeal of a particular program or programming package to any one individual subscriber. And the less the appeal of a particular programming package to a subscriber, the less the subscriber will pay for the package. These same compromises are required when an advertiser produces a marketing campaign for use in television or creates a marketing bundle, which combines a programming or advertising package with products and services.

[0010] Content providers conventionally utilize various methods to evaluate the popularity of content and to evaluate the interrelationships between content. For example, a television-programming provider may implement a program of voluntary logging of television viewing by a viewer, followed by transmission and human processing to analyze the information contained in the log. In addition, a provider may utilize telephone, mail, or other types of surveys to inquire from random or selected viewers about the viewers' viewing habits and request their recollections regarding their viewing patterns. A provider may also utilize automated monitoring systems that attempt to intercept television channel choices and changes, record these events, and provide the recording to a clearinghouse or other facility for further processing.

[0011] The provider may enlist a ratings company to perform the monitoring and processing. For example, Nielsen Media Research (Nielsen Media Research, Inc., New York, New York.), Arbitron (Arbitron Inc., New York, New York.), and MeasureCast (MeasureCast, Inc., Portland,

Oregon.) provide third-party monitoring and processing capability for television, radio, and Internet content.

[0012] The Nielsen Media Research (Nielsen) Ratings are perhaps the best known of the various third-party ratings services. Nielsen utilizes a variety of conventional sampling methods to determine the number of viewers watching a particular show. For example, in five thousand homes, Nielsen installs a People Meter. The People Meter records viewing patterns from television sets, cable television set-top boxes, videocassette recorders, satellite television set-top boxes, and other sources of television programming. The People Meter records what content the particular device is providing on an ongoing basis and periodically transmits this information to servers within a Nielsen facility. Nielsen combines the data uploaded from the People Meter with media content data to determine what programming and advertising a device displayed. Nielsen uses the combined data to provide a rating for each program and advertisement. In conjunction with the People Meter, Nielsen also utilizes viewer diaries and surveys to gather information from a broader spectrum of television viewers and to confirm the results generated by the People Meter.

[0013] Arbitron Inc. (Arbitron) is well known for providing radio broadcast ratings. Arbitron compiles ratings by utilizing surveys. Arbitron also provides television ratings based on various sampling techniques. In cooperation with Nielsen, Arbitron has developed a Portable People Meter to measure television ratings. The Portable People Meter is a pager-sized device, worn by a participant in a survey. The Portable People Meter records viewing by recording sounds encoded into each broadcast, which identify the program or advertisement. The survey participant periodically plugs the Portable People Meter into a recharger, which also includes a communicator that uploads the data in the Portable People Meter into a remote Arbitron server.

The Portable People Meter may be a more accurate method of television ratings than a set-top box, such as the set-top box used by Nielsen. The Portable People Meter offers the advantage of capturing viewing outside of the home and of recognizing when the viewer is not within audible range of a television, and therefore, less likely to be viewing a particular program or advertisement.

[0014] As the use of the Internet increases, the distribution of programming via Internet channels becomes more important. MeasureCast, Inc. (MeasureCast) provides a ratings system for Internet media streaming. MeasureCast records the number of streams requested from a streaming server and provides reports to programming providers and advertisers detailing the popularity of particular streams. As is the case in traditional broadcast media, the more popular the stream, the higher the advertising rate a broadcaster is able to charge.

[0015] Nielsen, Arbitron, and MeasureCast provide direct methods of measuring the popularity of a program. Various indirect methods are also used to determine the popularity of programming and the effectiveness of advertising. For example, advertising effectiveness is often measured in terms of viewer attitudes and subsequent viewer actions, such as purchases, inquiries, behavior changes, and other actions. Method of obtaining these indirect measures include: focus group tests, post-advertising surveys questioning whether an advertisement was viewed, remembered and possible impact, and measures of product purchases or other indirect results that may indicate whether or not an advertising campaign has been successful.

[0016] Conventional systems and methods for determining subscriber content-access patterns and preferences are inefficient and poorly suited for the immediate, timely creation of customized content. In addition, conventional systems, such as the Nielsen and Arbitron meters

rely on extremely small samples, which may not be representative of the target market for a particular advertiser.

[0017] Also, surveys are expensive and highly dependent on identifying individuals that may have been viewing television at the time of the advertisement. And post-advertising results measurements suffer from questions of causality and external influences. Focus groups allow reasonably efficient low-volume viewer analysis, but statistical analysis requires an adequate number of participants and tightly controlled tests, a combination that may be difficult to achieve.

[0018] Conventional systems and methods lack simple, effective, and efficient means for determining content genre preferences. Conventional systems and methods also lack simple and efficient means for determining the duration of viewing patterns, especially as those patterns are affected by the genre or type of content, the time-of-day of a broadcast, and the content broadcast simultaneously with or adjacently to the content of interest.

SUMMARY

[0019] The present invention provides systems and methods for tailoring media content and related offerings to individual subscribers. An embodiment of the present invention includes a subscriber database, a data analyzer electronically connected to the subscriber database, and a distribution server. The data analyzer uses subscriber attributes in the subscriber database to create tailored content and content-related offerings. The tailored content is subsequently distributed by the distribution server.

[0020] The subscriber database includes attributes of a subscriber as well as a media-content-access history of the subscriber. Attributes of a subscriber include demographic measures of the

subscriber. The media-content-access history of the subscriber may comprise a subscriber content-choice database.

[0021] In order to merge content and subscriber actions, an embodiment of the present invention includes a merge processor and national and local content databases. Also, in order to categorize programming and advertising, in an embodiment of the present invention, a category database is electronically linked to the media-content database. The category database may comprise a program category or genre database and/or an advertisement category database. The merge processor operates to assign a category to a media-content detail and create a content choice record by merging a subscriber action detail with the categorized media-content detail. An embodiment of the present invention may comprise a computer-readable medium comprising computer code to implement the process.

[0022] In another embodiment of the present invention, the merge processor receives a series of subscriber actions, merges the actions with media-content detail, and then attempts to correlate the actions with one another. The merge processor may also assign a category to the media-content detail and perform a probability analysis on the subscriber content choice information created as a result of the process in order to predict future subscriber actions.

[0023] In an embodiment of the present invention, a subscriber action database may contain additional information, including a subscriber identifier and a clickstream database. The media-content database includes programming and/or advertising content. In various embodiments of the present invention, programming and advertising information may be included in a single database or in multiple databases. Each of these databases includes a common key data element.

[0024] An embodiment of the present invention provides numerous advantages over conventional systems for using subscriber content-choice information to tailor content-related offerings for individual subscribers or to small groups of subscribers.

[0025] It is difficult and inefficient in conventional systems to tailor content-related offerings because the information necessary to tailor the offerings is often unavailable. In an embodiment of the present invention, the necessary subscriber-specific data is made available by merging subscriber content choices with various other subscriber attributes. Content providers are able to tailor content-related offerings and charge a premium for these offerings.

[0026] Further details and advantages of the present invention are set forth below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention are better understood when the following Detailed Description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a diagram of an exemplary embodiment and an exemplary environment for operation of an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating a process implemented by a merge processor in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3A is a table illustrating various sources of programming and advertising content available to a subscriber during a period of time in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3B illustrates content displayed on a subscriber's television during a period of time in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating the process of merging the data shown in Figure 3A to

create the merged data shown in Figure 3B in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a table illustrating the programming viewed by the subscriber during the period shown in Figures 3A, 3B, and 4 in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating a method of analyzing the data collected and combined in the subscriber database to formulate a new programming offering in an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0027] Embodiments of the present invention provide systems and methods for creating tailored television content-related offerings based on subscriber-specific data. In an embodiment of the present invention, a offering may be tailored based solely on subscriber content choices or based on subscriber content choices in combination with other attributes of the subscriber such as demographics, purchasing history, and/or other relevant attributes.

[0028] Various types of offerings may be made available in an embodiment of the present invention. For example, a cable television content provider may create a direct marketing campaign based on subscriber data. In addition, a television content provider may create a programming offering tailored to an individual subscriber's needs and measured preferences. In an embodiment of the present invention, a content provider also determines an individual subscriber's willingness to pay for a programming offering based on subscriber-related information.

[0029] In another embodiment of the present invention, a television content provider utilizes information in a subscriber database to develop incentives, which are made available to viewers evidencing "desirable viewer patterns." Such special incentives would be of value to advertisers

as well as to television program providers. In addition, a content provider may use the information available in an embodiment of the present invention to bundle programming offerings with other products and services.

[0030] In an embodiment of the present invention, a subscriber's television viewing patterns are combined with programming and advertising media-content detail to determine the subscriber's content choices. These content choices are categorized so that the data may be analyzed at various levels and from various perspectives. In another embodiment, a subscriber's content choice is correlated with preceding and succeeding content choices to determine how various combinations of advertising and programming content affect a subscriber's content choices.

[0031] Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary environment for an embodiment of the present invention. In the embodiment shown, a cable operator's head-end facility 102 includes a merge processor 104, which is in communication with a plurality of databases. These databases include a local-content database 106, a subscriber-action database 112, and a national-content database 114. The merge processor 104 is programmed to receive and merge data from the two databases 112, 114.

[0032] The local-content database 106 includes information from the advertising 108 and programming 110 databases. The advertising database 108 includes information related to local advertising produced and/or provided by the cable operator or other local source. Likewise, the programming database 110 includes information related to locally produced and/or provided programming. The advertising database 108 includes attributes of advertisements, such as the advertiser, producer, brand, product type, length of the content, and other descriptive information. The programming database 110 includes similar information related to

programming, including the producer, type of programming, length, rating, and other descriptive information. The local-content 106, programming 108, and advertising 110 databases include a date-time identifier, which indicates when a program or advertisement has been provided. The date-time indicator provides a key value for merging various databases with one another.

[0033] In the embodiment of the present invention shown in Figure 1, the cable operator head-end 102 also includes a national-content database 114. The national-content database 114 includes information from an advertising database 116 and a programming database 118. The information contained in each of these respective databases is similar to that contained in the local advertising 108 and programming 110 databases. However, the content is produced for a national audience and subsequently provided to the cable operator. The national-content 114, programming 118, and advertising 116 databases also include a date-time identifier.

[0034] The cable operator head-end 102 also includes a subscriber-action database 112. The subscriber-action database 112 includes the actions taken by subscribers while viewing television sets. For example, in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, subscriber-action database 112 is in communication with cable network 120. A processor (not shown) in cable network 120 receives any subscriber actions transmitted via cable network 120 and inserts the actions as records in subscriber-action database 112. Also in communication with cable network 120 is a set-top box 124, which is installed in a subscriber's home 122. Also located in subscriber's home 122 is a television (TV) 126. As a subscriber 123 makes viewing choices on TV 126 via set-top box 124, these choices or actions are transmitted via a processor (not shown) in cable network 120 to the subscriber-action database 112.

[0035] The subscriber-action database may include a clickstream database. A clickstream database is common in Internet monitoring applications. Each time a web-browser user clicks on

a link in a web page, a record of that click is stored in a conventional clickstream database. A database that includes similar information for television viewers is disclosed in a patent application filed on May 25, 2000 by Edward R. Grauch, et. al., Serial No. 09/496,92, entitled "Method and System for Tracking Network Use," which is hereby incorporated by reference. In the database described, each action taken by a television subscriber 123, such as "channel up" and "channel down" are stored in a database with a date-time stamp to allow tracking of the television subscriber's actions.

[0036] In the embodiment shown in Figure 1, a merge processor 104 receives information from the local-content 106, national-content 114, and subscriber-action 112 databases and merges the data based on date-time attributes of the data. For example, a detail record in the subscriber-action database 112 indicates that a subscriber's set-top box 124 was tuned to channel 12, a National Broadcasting Company (NBC) affiliate. A record in the national-content database 114 indicates that at the same point in time, NBC was broadcasting a Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournament. A record in the local-content database 106 further indicates that the cable provider preempted the PGA tournament to broadcast an infomercial for a real estate investment strategy video. The merge processor 104 receives information from each of these sources and determines that at the point in time of interest, the subscriber 123 was watching the infomercial. The merge processor stores the resultant data in the subscriber content-choice database 128. In one embodiment of the present invention, the merge processor collects information from the various databases rather than receiving it. For example, a program on the merge processor 104 includes instructions for connecting to the various databases and extracting data from each one.

[0037] In another embodiment of the present invention, subscriber content-choice database 128 includes merged information for a period of time and for a plurality of subscribers. For example, a program provider may wish to track the popularity of a program for several thousand subscribers for an entire month. Another provider may be interested in analyzing the seasonal differences in subscriber viewing behaviors.

[0038] The embodiment shown in Figure 1 also includes a subscriber database 130. Subscriber database 130 includes various attributes about a subscriber. In addition, subscriber database 130 includes information from subscriber content-choice database 128.

[0039] An analyzer 131 accesses the information in the subscriber database 130. The analyzer 131 provides tools to an analyst or other person associated with a content provider to discern patterns in the subscriber database 130 for which specific programming or advertising packages are developed. The analyzer 131 may include simple query tools or may include complex online analytical processing tools, such as a multidimensional database or data mining application.

[0040] An embodiment of the present invention also includes a content distribution server 132. Once a content provider has created content tailored to individual subscribers, the content provider places the content on the content distribution server 132. A content distribution server 132 may include, for example, a digital video storage and broadcast server. The content distribution server 132 distributes the tailored content to a subscriber's set-top box 124 via cable network 120.

[0041] Although in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the cable network is a two-way digital cable network, various other network types may also be utilized. For example, in one embodiment, subscriber's home 122 receives cable service via a digital one-way cable system.

In such a system, set-top box 124 may communicate subscriber actions to subscriber-action database through a modem and telephone connection periodically. In another embodiment, subscriber 123 receives content through a digital subscriber line (DSL) from a DSL provider. In a DSL system, the set-top box 124 is able to perform two-way communications and can therefore transmit subscriber actions to subscriber-action database 112 directly.

[0042] Although in the embodiment shown, the various databases and merge processor 104 are located in the head-end facility 102, in other embodiments, the databases and merge processor 104 exist as software within the set-top box 124 or as software residing within a television network's facility (not shown). The data may be captured and analyzed by programming and advertising producers or distributors or may be utilized within a subscriber's set-top box 124 to provide advanced services tailored to the subscriber 123.

[0043] Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating the general process the merge processor (104) shown in Figure 1 implements to categorize and merge data from the various databases in an embodiment of the present invention. Figures 3-5 illustrate the process in greater detail.

[0044] Referring to Figure 2, merge processor (104) receives subscriber action data from the subscriber-action database (112) 202. Subscriber action data may include data indicating that the subscriber 123 viewed an alternate data source for a period of time. For example, the subscriber 123 may view video from a VCR or DVD or other video source for a period of time. This video source supersedes both national and local-content in the subscriber content-choice database 128.

[0045] The merge processor (104) also receives data from the national-content database (114) 204. National-content data includes data describing media, such as programming and media, supplied by national providers. The merge processor (104) next assigns a category or genre to the national-content data 206. A genre is a specific type of category used in relation to

artistic compositions, and genre and category are used interchangeably herein. The merge processor (104) assigns categories to content based on attributes of the content. For example, a program has a name and a creation date. The name of the program is “Wake Forest University vs. Duke University Basketball Game,” and a creation date equal to the current date. The merge processor (104) uses logic in a computer program to determine that the program should be categorized as a “Live Sporting Event.” The merge processor (104) may assign multiple categories to a single program, such as “Basketball,” “Sports,” “College-Related Programming,” or some other broad descriptive term.

[0046] The merge processor also receives data from the local-content database (106) 208. The merge processor (104) then assigns a category to the local-content data 210 in a manner similar to the process of assigning a category to national-content data.

[0047] Once the merge processor has assigned a category to data in each of the content databases, the merge processor merges the categorized content data, national and local, with data from the subscriber-action database (112) 212 and creates records with the combined data in the subscriber content-choice database (128) 214. Since the content data was categorized prior to the merge process, the data in the subscriber content-choice database 214 retains the assigned categories. Therefore, data in the subscriber content-choice database 214 can be sorted, filtered, reported, and used for various other processes, which utilize groupings of the data.

[0048] The subscriber content-choice database 128 may be implemented in various ways. For example, the database 128 may simply be a number of tables in a relational database. To simplify the process of querying the data, the database may include an online analytical processing tool, such as a multidimensional database.

[0049] Figure 3A illustrates the sources of programming and advertising content available to the subscriber 123 while the set-top box 124 is tuned to a single channel. Figure 3B illustrates the content displayed on the TV. Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating the process of merging the various content types shown in Figure 3A to determine the content displayed on a particular channel.

[0050] Figure 3A includes a Content Type column 302. The various content types displayed in the Content Type column 302 are shown in relation to Time 304. Time 304 in Figure 3A is divided into hour 306 and quarter-hour 308 segments. Figure 3A represents a simplistic scenario in which set-top box 124 is tuned to a single channel. Therefore, the Content Type 302 column includes five types of content: National Programming 310, National Advertising 312, Local Programming 314, Local Advertising 316, and Other Video Source 318. In order to present a simplified view of the available content types during the period, several content types overlap, when in reality, they would actually occur in series. For example, National Programming 310 and National Advertising 312 do not occur at the same time, but it is likely that programming and advertising both would be broadcast for at least some period of time during the fifteen minute periods of overlap shown in Figure 3A. For example, during a television program provided by a broadcast network, a two or three-minute break occurs approximately every fifteen minutes. Therefore, a fifteen-minute period in which a three-minute break occurs will include twelve minutes of programming and three minutes of advertising.

[0051] As shown in Figure 3A, multiple types of content may be provided during any period of time. The fact that the content is provided does not indicate that it is available on the set-top box (124) or that the subscriber 123 is viewing the content. For example, in the embodiment shown, the cable provider provided National Programming 310 continuously throughout the

period. The provider provided National Advertising 312 approximately every 15 minutes during the same period. Also, the cable provider provided Local Programming 314 from 1:00 until 2:30, and Local Advertising 316 approximately every 15 minutes during that period. The cable provider subsequently provided Local Advertising 316 during the period beginning at 5:15. Also during the period shown in Figure 3A, the subscriber 123 viewed input from the Other Video Source 318, e.g., VCR or DVD, from 2:30 until 4:15.

[0052] Figure 4 illustrates the process for determining which programming is displayed on the subscriber's television during any specific period of time and inserting that data into the subscriber content-choice database 128 if the subscriber 123 is viewing that channel. Although various sources of content, such as a cable TV channel or a DVD movie, may be available to the subscriber (123) during any period of time, the subscriber (123) generally views only one source of programming or advertising at any one time. In addition, a content provider, such as a cable operator, makes determinations regarding which content will be available via a communications channel.

[0053] In an embodiment of the present invention, a computer program executing on merge processor (104) processes the potentially viewable data sources as a hierarchy. The program first determines, using information in the subscriber-action database (112) whether the subscriber (123) was viewing another video source, such as a VCR or DVD 402. If so, the program inserts data describing the other video source 404 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends 416.

[0054] If the subscriber (123) was not viewing an alternate source of video and was tuned to a particular channel, then the subscriber (123) was viewing the content provided by the cable operator on that channel. To determine what content was provided by the cable provider, the

program executing on the merge processor (104) determines whether the cable provider was providing local programming or advertising during the period of time 406 by accessing the local-content database (106). If so, the program inserts data describing the local programming or advertising 408 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends. If the cable provider was not providing local programming or advertising, the program determines whether or not the provider was providing national programming or advertising 410 by accessing the national-content database (114). If so, the program inserts data describing the national programming or advertising 412 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends 416.

[0055] If the program determines that the subscriber 123 was not viewing another video source and the provider was providing no content, the program either inserts a record in the subscriber content-choice database 128 indicating that no content was available during the specific period of time or inserts no data at all 416. For example, if TV 126 is left on after a broadcaster ends broadcasting for the rest of the day, no content is available after the broadcaster ceases broadcasting, so either a record indicating the lack of content is inserted, or no data is inserted.

[0056] It is important to note that in an embodiment of the present invention, the process illustrated in Figure 4 is repeated for each period of time that is of interest for analyzing the data. The result of the process is a plurality of records describing a subscriber's viewing patterns during a period of time. In one embodiment of the present invention, the subscriber content-choice database (128) includes data from a plurality of subscribers as well. The databases and processor (104) in such an embodiment are configured appropriately to process the anticipated volume of data.

[0057] In the embodiment shown in Figures 3A and 3B, the process is repeated for each quarter hour. In other embodiments, the time period may be divided into smaller increments, such as tenth-of-a-second increments.

[0058] Figure 3B illustrates the result of merging the data records shown in Figure 3A using the process illustrated in Figure 4. As in Figure 3A, Figure 3B is a simplistic view of this data, including the Content Type 302 and the various slices of time 304, 306, 308. In the table shown in Figure 3B, the Content Type column 302 includes only a Programming 320 and an Advertising 322 row.

[0059] As shown in Figure 3A, during the period from 1:00 until 2:30, the cable provider provides local programming and advertising 312, 314. The process of Figure 4 determined that the subscriber 123 was viewing no other video source 318, and therefore, the program inserts data into the subscriber content-choice database 128 related to local programming and advertising 320, 322. During the period beginning at 2:30 and ending at 4:15, the subscriber 123 viewed video from another source 318. Therefore, the program inserts data related to the other source for this time period. During the period from 4:15 until 5:15, the provider provided national programming and advertising with the exception of the period from 5:15 until 5:30, during which local advertising was provided. The program inserts this data into the subscriber content-choice database.

[0060] Figure 5 is a table illustrating the programming that the subscriber 123 viewed during the period shown in Figures 3A and 3B. As with Figures 3A and 3B, the table includes a Time section 502 and a Content section 504. The Time section 502 is divided into hour and quarter-hour segments.

[0061] According to Figures 3A and 3B, between 1:00 and 2:30, the subscriber 123 viewed local programming and advertising. By accessing the local-content database (106), the merge processor (104) determines that the local programming consisted of a NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) basketball game and local advertising 506.

[0062] According to Figures 3A and 3B, during the period from 2:30 until 4:15, the subscriber (123) viewed a DVD 508. The merge processor (104) determines that the DVD was a science fiction DVD by extracting data from the subscriber-action database (112).

[0063] And according to Figures 3A and 3B, between 4:15 and 5:15, the subscriber (123) viewed national content and advertising, with the exception of the period between 5:15 and 5:30 during which the cable operator inserted a local advertisement segment in the content stream in place of the national content 510. By accessing the national-content database (114), the merge processor (104) determines that the national content viewed by the subscriber (123) was an NBA (National Basketball Association) basketball game.

[0064] In an embodiment of the present invention, an analyst evaluates the data shown in Figure 5 to determine preferences and viewing habits of the subscriber (123). In one embodiment of the present invention, the analyst is a computer program executing on a processor (not shown). The analyst also attempts to extrapolate the data in order to project purchase habits of the subscriber 123. In order to evaluate the data shown in Figure 5, the analyst begins by assigning a category or genre to the programming. For example, during the period between 1:00 and 2:30, the subscriber 123 viewed a NCAA basketball game 506. An analyst would assign various types and levels of categories to the game, such as basketball, college athletics (type of program), college name, and conference. The analyst may also note that sometime between 2:15 and 2:30, a PGA golf tournament began, and the subscriber 123 started a DVD movie. This

might indicate that the subscriber 123 did not enjoy watching golf on TV. During the same period, the subscriber 123 also watched several advertisements. The analyst categorizes these as well. The analyst repeats the process of categorization of programming and advertising for the remainder of the data 508, 510.

[0065] By categorizing content using multiple category types and multiple levels, the analyst is able to provide an abundance of information to programming and advertising producers, and providers, as well as to the product owners and manufacturers who pay to have the ads produced and distributed. Categorization in this manner also provides the analyst with multiple perspectives from which to analyze the data.

[0066] In addition, in an embodiment of the present invention, the analyst may look for patterns or correlations between multiple programs and advertisements or between categories of multiple programs and advertisements. In correlating data, the analyst is seeking causal, complementary, parallel, or reciprocal relations between various occurrences of data. For example, in the embodiment shown in Figure 5, the subscriber 123 viewed a basketball game, a science fiction movie, and another basketball game. An analyst may correlate this data and find that the subscriber 123 generally watches primarily sports-related broadcasts, and otherwise watches content from video sources in the home. The analyst may also perform a probability analysis to determine the likelihood that a subscriber 123 will watch a particular category or genre of show if presented with the opportunity.

[0067] Although only a brief period of time is shown in the Figures, the subscriber content-choice database includes data recorded continually over many days. By analyzing various days and time periods, an analyst can determine a subscribers time-of-day viewing patterns as well as

the subscriber's patterns of viewing duration. For example, an analyst may determine whether the subscriber 123 tends to view the entirety of a program or of an advertisement.

[0068] Determining the duration of viewing of advertisements is important to advertisers. If a subscriber 123 initially views an entire advertisement but subsequently, views only a small portion of the advertisement, then the advertiser may need to reschedule the advertisement so that it runs less frequently, or replace the advertisement altogether. Also, if subscribers viewing a particular category of programming generally view ads in their entirety, but other viewers do not, the advertiser may want to focus resources on presenting the advertisement to these viewers.

[0069] Beyond analyzing ads in general, advertisers may also desire information related to specific ads or even of a competitor's ads. Using the information, the advertiser may be able to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the advertisers own strategy versus a competitor's strategy.

[0070] In an embodiment of the present invention, various indirect methods are also used to determine the popularity of programming and the effectiveness of advertising. For example, advertising effectiveness is often measured in terms of viewer attitudes and subsequent viewer actions, such as purchases, inquiries, behavior changes, and other actions. Method of obtaining these indirect measures include: focus group tests, post-advertising surveys questioning whether an advertisement was viewed, remembered and possible impact, and measures of product purchases or other indirect results that may indicate whether or not an advertising campaign has been successful. In an embodiment of the present invention, additional databases store the data derived through these indirect methods. The merge processor 104 combines this data with the data in the subscriber content-choice database 128 to provide additional information to analysts and content providers.

[0071] The embodiment shown in Figure 1 includes an analyzer 131. The analyzer 131 is a computer, which includes program code for analyzing data in the subscriber database 130. In one embodiment, the analyzer 131 creates reports, including both summary and detailed information regarding subscribers' content choices. Content providers, such as a cable operator, use these reports for various purposes, including creating directly marketing campaigns, designing program offerings, pricing program offerings, creating incentive packages that will appeal to certain groups of subscribers, and creating offerings including content along with complementary products and/or services.

[0072] Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating a method of analyzing the data collected and combined in the subscriber database 130 shown in Figure 1 to formulate a new programming offering in an embodiment of the present invention. The content provider first uses the analyzer 131 to analyze data in the subscriber database (130) 602. For example, analyzer 131 generates a report, which details the viewing history of subscribers for Saturday afternoons from September until November. A cable provider reads the report and determines that a group of the cable operator's subscribers watch nothing but football between noon and midnight. In another embodiment, a data-mining application executing on the analyzer 131 reaches the same conclusion.

[0073] Referring again to Figure 6, based on the results of the analysis, the content provider attempts to identify any unfulfilled subscriber demand evident in the output from the analyzer 603. For example, in the case of the football fans, the cable provider may limit the subscribers' channel hopping behavior by offering an all-football channel. If the subscribers limit their channel-hopping, they may also be more likely to view the advertisements that the cable operator includes with the programming. Since the cable operator can also create reports that include

advertisement viewing, the cable operator has the ability to demonstrate the decrease in channel hopping and increase in advertisement viewing to the advertisers.

[0074] Once the content provider has identified what is needed, the content provider determines whether or not an existing offering would fulfill the unmet demand 604. If the content provider has an offering meeting the unmet need, the subscriber determines how to direct the identified subscribers to the offering 605. For example, the cable operator may already offer an all-football-all-the-time channel. However, few subscribers are aware of the channel. The cable operator may direct advertising to the football fans, informing them that the all-football-all-the-time channel exists.

[0075] If an offering meeting the unmet demand does not already exist, the content provider develops a new offering 606. For example, if the cable operator does not have an all-football-all-the-time channel, the subscriber may create one by combining various national and local programming.

[0076] The content provider next sets the pricing for the existing or new offering 608. If the content provider has created a new offering, the price will likely be set higher than it would be for an existing offering because the cost in time and resources to develop the offering must be recouped. Also, the smaller the group for which a offering is tailored, the higher the price is likely to be because the cost of producing the offering is spread out among a small group of subscribers. For example, if the cable operator has an existing all-football-all-the-time channel, the cost of direct advertising to the football fans may be minimal compared to the increases in ratings and therefore advertising revenue derived from the advertising. However, if the cable operator purchases additional broadcasting rights in order to create the all-football-all-the-time channel, the cost will likely be passed on to subscribers who opt to subscribe to the channel.

[0077] Once the pricing is set, the provider delivers the content offering 610. The content provider may determine what an offering includes in various ways, including, for example, writing various options on paper or using a simple computer application, such as a spreadsheet. The offering may be created using a computer. For example, in one embodiment of the present invention, a computer program on analyzer 131 is able to analyze subscriber content-access histories to determine unfulfilled needs and creates content offerings specifically targeted to those needs.

[0078] At some point, the program must be made available to actual subscribers. For example, in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, a cable operator loads the all-football-all-the-time channel offering on the content-distribution server 132 for delivery via the cable network 120.

[0079] In an embodiment of the present invention, a similar process may be implemented to bundle combinations of various content offerings or bundles that include content offerings and products and/or services. For example, a cable operator offering the all-football-all-the-time channel may partner with a travel agency to offer a bundle including travel to and accommodations in the city hosting the Super Bowl. The price for the bundle is set in a manner similar to the process used to price a simple content offering: a new bundle or a bundle directed to a small number of subscribers carries a higher price than an existing bundle or a bundle targeted at a large group of subscribers. For example, very few football fans are likely to attend the Super Bowl, to the price of the bundle is discounted only slightly from the normal cost of accessing the channel and traveling to the Super Bowl host city.

[0080] An embodiment of the present invention provides great value to content providers. As a result, content providers are willing to pay for the outputs derived from the various reports

and analysis. The content providers may be billed a flat subscription-type rate for access to all information collected or they may pay for each report and/or analysis that they request.

[0081] An embodiment of the present invention includes a computer-readable medium, having computer-readable instructions for analyzing subscriber-specific data to develop subscriber-specific content offerings. A computer-readable medium includes an electronic, optical, magnetic, or other storage or transmission device capable of providing a processor, such as the processor in a web server, with computer-readable instructions. Examples of such media include, but are not limited to, a floppy disk, CD-ROM, magnetic disk, memory chip, or any other medium from which a computer processor can read. Also, various other forms of computer-readable media may transmit or carry instructions to a computer, including a router, private or public network, or other transmission device or channel.

[0082] The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the invention has been presented only for the purpose of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Numerous modifications and adaptations thereof will be apparent to those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.